

SENDING A CLEAR MESSAGE: HOW CITIZENS RESPOND TO THE CONTENT OF
CANDIDATES' MESSAGES

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ABSTRACT

KEVIN K. BANDA: Sending a Clear Message: How Citizens Respond to the Content of
Candidates' Messages
(Under the direction of Thomas M. Carsey.)

During campaigns, citizens form attitudes about candidates for office by collecting information from a number of sources, the most important of which may be from the candidates themselves. This information, though limited, should influence citizens' evaluations of the candidates' ideologies and positions on issues. How do citizens respond to the informational content contained in the statements candidates make during campaigns? How does this content influence (1) citizens' evaluations of candidates and (2) their certainty about these evaluations? I use data collected through two survey experiments to show that the issues politicians choose to talk about and the positions they take drive evaluations of both their ideology and positions on issues, including issues that they do not discuss. The relationship between the information in candidates' statements and the level of certainty expressed by participants is less clear, but suggests that a greater volume of precise information about issues leads people to feel more certain about the evaluations they make.

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Introduction

Citizens are given a great deal of responsibility when faced with the task of making a decision about candidates during campaigns. In order to make an informed decision, they are required to sift through relatively little readily available information in order to form opinions about the candidates. These attitudes should eventually contribute to a decision to turn out and a vote choice. Given the relatively low levels of interest most people have in politics, it should come as no surprise that they look to the candidates themselves for information about their positions, personal characteristics, and records. Once citizens have been exposed to this information, they process it and form or alter the attitudes they hold about political candidates. Further, because candidates do not discuss their positions on every issue, citizens must use the information they have to make inferences about where candidates stand on these kinds of issues. The issues that candidates address and the positions they take on these issues should influence citizens' evaluations not only of their positions on political issues, but also of their ideology. How do citizens respond to the informational content contained in the statements candidates make during campaigns?

The attitudes citizens hold and the evaluations they make about candidates should be influenced at least in part by the information communicated to them in the statements made by candidates. The precision of this information should affect citizens' feelings of certainty about their evaluations of political candidates. I will address the following questions in this research: (1) how do citizens react to differing levels of ambiguity in candidates' statements; (2) as the clarity of these messages changes, how do citizens' evaluations of candidates' issue positions and ideology change; and (3) how does the clarity of campaign messages affect citizens' feelings of certainty about the evaluations they make of candidates?

I examine the influence of candidate clarity on (1) the evaluations that citizens make about candidates' ideology and issue positions and (2) on the certainty that they feel about these appraisals by analyzing data drawn from two survey experiments in which I exposed respondents to statements made by two fictional Senators containing varying levels of ambiguity. I present strong evidence that the issues politicians choose to talk about and the positions they take drive evaluations of both their ideology and positions on issues. The level of certainty participants report feeling about their evaluations is also influenced by the informational content of candidates' messages, though this relationship is not as strong.

Ambiguity in Campaign Messages

The information environment that campaigns create stimulates voters, causing them to create or alter existing evaluations of political candidates (Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau 1995). Previous research has shown that clarity affects mass perceptions of ideology (Franklin 1991), but clarity's influence on evaluations of candidates' issue positions has yet to be examined. Precise information should tell people more about the candidates than should ambiguous information. Ambiguous information poses a challenge to voters because it requires them to make inferences about the issue positions and ideology of a candidate. While this may be beneficial for some candidates, it makes attitude formation and the vote choice more difficult for voters. How might voters evaluate ambiguous candidates?

Social cognition research suggests that citizens evaluate candidates by categorizing them based on a social taxonomy in a subconscious attempt to reduce the complexity of the social world (Conover and Feldman 1989; Kinder 1986; Lodge, McGraw, and Stroh 1989; Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986; Rahn et al. 1990). Categorizing candidates is the most straightforward way of reducing political complexity. Citizens have certain expectations about which issues are associated with members of the parties based both on their histories (Petrocik 1996; Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003) and on stereotypes associated with them (Rahn 1993). Democratic and Republican elected officials have long exhibited consistently different policy preferences (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Page 1978), a fact that likely reinforces Americans' tendency to think about politics in terms of groups (Converse 1964). Party labels and other partisan cues provide voters with informational shortcuts (Downs 1957) and knowledge about the partisanship of a candidate allows people to make useful inferences (Conover 1981; Granberg, Kasmer, and Nanneman 1988; Hamill, Lodge, and Blake 1985; Hurwitz 1985; Jacoby 1988; Page 1978; Riggall et al. 1992; Wright and Niemi 1983).

Ambiguous messages are problematic because they may damage the abilities of citizens to judge the ideological and issue positions of candidates. Voters do not like feeling uncertain about where candidates stand (Bartels 1986, but see Tomz and Van Houweling 2009). While an ambiguous campaign environment may benefit some candidates, it does not promote a healthy democratic system. Citizens must be both willing and able to make informed decisions about the type of representation they desire in government. While politicians may not be able to do much to increase citizens' interest in becoming informed, ambiguous messages increase the likelihood that a significant portion of the electorate, i.e. those with lower levels of political knowledge and sophistication, will be unable to participate efficaciously in a democratic system.

Ambiguous messages may be confusing to voters. Their evaluations of candidates may not be

based on what might be considered the correct kind of information from a normative standpoint. Indeed, they may have little choice; if a citizen is only exposed to ambiguous messages, they may not have the proper information to make well reasoned judgments about a candidate who has chosen to communicate in an ambiguous fashion. Such a lack of substantive information could lead to lower levels of certainty and perhaps lead them to base their evaluation of candidates' ideologies on irrelevant information (see for example Abrajano 2005). They may, in the absence of precise communications, even go so far as to project their own ideological and issue positions onto the candidates.

This fear is likely overstated. Previous research has shown that citizens without access to precise information about political candidates do not project their own ideologies and issue positions upon the candidates; they evaluated candidates based on the candidates' partisanship (Conover and Feldman 1982; Feldman and Conover 1983). Candidates were assumed to hold ideologies and positions on issues in line with their parties, a finding that is certainly in line with Downs' (1957) argument.

While it is generally agreed that issues are important to voters, there is some evidence that they are unable to recall the issues that candidates talk about during campaigns (Dalager 1996). If this is so, then perhaps the level of issue content in messages is irrelevant because citizens will quickly forget about it. However, there is evidence that (1) repetition in campaign advertising reinforces associations between issues and candidates (Claibourn 2008) and (2) citizens evaluate candidates using an on-line process (Lodge, McGraw, and Stroh 1989; Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau 1995; McGraw and Stroh 1990), meaning that even if citizens forget specifics, they may still have a general understanding about candidates' ideologies and positions on issues. Ambiguous messages may aggregate on-line just as other forms of political communication do and thus may have a significant effect on the way citizens evaluate the ideological and issue positions of politicians.

Precise messages should be less confusing to voters than ambiguous messages. When candidates talk about and take positions on issues, they are giving citizens valuable information that should allow citizens to properly evaluate them in the context of a campaign. Citizens can process this information and use it to make better informed judgments about the candidates. In addition, exposure to concrete information should facilitate feelings of greater certainty on the part of citizens when evaluating candidates.

This may not always be the case. Citizens' reactions to the messages produced by candidates may be different if the candidates talk about issues that are not commonly associated with their party or if they take surprising positions on issues. Findings reported in the issue ownership literature suggest that certain issues have become associated with the parties to the extent that

they are perceived by the electorate to be “owned” by one of the parties (Petrocik 1996; Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003). If citizens associate some issues and positions with the parties, then they should be expected to evaluate a candidate who talks about a Democratic issue as being more liberal and holding a position more in line with the Democratic Party than they otherwise would have been. Should a candidate take a Democratic position on an issue, my expectation for the citizen’s evaluative process would be the same. If, however, this candidate took a Republican position on the issue, the citizen should evaluate the candidate as being more conservative and holding a position closer to one expected of members of the Republican Party.

While we might usually expect that citizens would be more certain about their assessments of candidates who avoid ambiguous campaign messages, this may not be true when candidates talk about issues that are not owned by their parties. When a candidate takes the expected position of the other party, citizens may react by adjusting their assessments of her positions on various issues but, despite having processed concrete rather than ambiguous information, they may be left unsure about these evaluations because the candidate’s position is so unexpected given their party affiliation.¹

How do citizens evaluate candidates on issues on which they have not heard the candidate speak? I posit that they will use the information that they have at their disposal to infer candidates’ issue positions. For example, a candidate who has taken consistently conservative (liberal) positions on a number of issues may reasonably be inferred as holding conservative (liberal) positions on other issues. This sort of inference is reasonable because political elites are ideologically constrained to a greater extent than are voters. Politicians generally hold positions that are at the very least moderately cohesive with their parties, even in marginal districts.

Clarity of Message

Clarity can be conceptualized as existing on two continuous dimensions. A message’s position on the first dimension indicates to what degree the candidate is addressing issue vs non-issue concerns. At one extreme, a candidate would discuss nothing but policy while at the other, they would discuss nothing policy-related, instead concentrating on topics orthogonal to policy like their professional qualifications.

The second dimension involves candidates’ issue positions; how precisely do they identify their position on an issue? At one extreme, candidates explicitly identify their position on an issue while at the other extreme they do not mention a position at all.² If candidates

¹ It is certainly possible the citizen’s level of political sophistication could play a role here. Highly sophisticated citizens may be more certain of their evaluations while those with lower levels of political sophistication, who tend to think of politics in simpler terms, may be less certain of their evaluations under these conditions.

² Messages that have no issue content are assumed to be at the latter end of the spectrum.

craft political messages about issues that lack explicit statements about their positions, this still communicates information to the voters; candidates who talk about issues without stating an explicit position implicitly communicate their position to voters, who are able to infer this position based on (1) the partisanship of the candidate and (2) the party that owns the issue (Conover and Feldman 1982; Feldman and Conover 1983; Petrocik 1996; Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003). A candidate's partisanship is a cue because Democrats (Republicans) tend to hold similar positions on issues as do other Democrats (Republicans). Further, parties "own" an issue when most citizens believe that they are better equipped to deal with problems involving that issue than the other party. If a candidate talks about an owned issue but does not take a position on it, it is reasonable when little else is known about the candidate for citizens to evaluate her as holding a position that is congruent with the party that owns the issue. For example, a Democrat who talks about a Republican-owned issue like taxation but does not take a position can be assumed to be positioned on the Republican end of the issue space.

Candidate Evaluation

Citizens evaluate candidates based upon the information they have about them. This information comes from their party label and from a number of other sources such as the media, other politicians, interest groups, and the politicians themselves. Citizens should process and react to this information so long as they believe the source of the information is credible. The candidates themselves are reasonable sources of information, so the information they transmit to potential constituents should inform the attitudes citizens hold about them.

When citizens hear candidates talk about issues, the ownership of the issue should cue them to think about the candidates in terms of the party that owns the issue in the absence of explicitly stated positions on issues. This is a reasonable assumption because citizens believe that parties that own an issue are better at handling problems in a this policy area than is the party that does not own the issue. For example, a Democratic candidate who talks about taxes but does not identify a position the issue should be evaluated as (1) being more conservative and (2) holding positions on issues more in line with the Republican rather than the Democratic Party than she might otherwise have been had she not discussed any party owned issue. Not only do most people tend to think that the Republican Party is better equipped to deal with issues of taxation, but the party itself has staked a claim to the issue. Therefore, if a citizen hears a political candidate talking about taxation and knows little or nothing else about the candidate, they should evaluate them as being more conservative and as holding positions on issues more congruent with the Republican Party than a person who did not hear the candidate's statements about taxation.

Citizens should react similarly when they hear candidates take explicit positions on issues. People associate positions on many issues with one of the parties, so when a candidate takes Democratic positions on one or more issues, people are able to reasonably infer that they are more liberal than they might have believed had the candidate not identified a position. Citizens who know that this candidate holds positions more in line with the Democratic Party on issues should also evaluate them as holding more extreme positions on these issues than they would have had they not known about positions the candidate claims to hold.

Because candidates do not discuss all political issues, citizens must infer the positions they hold on these issues based on the information to which they have access: the issues candidates choose to talk about and the positions they explicate. Because partisan elites tend to exhibit higher levels of attitude constraint than do non-elites, it is not unreasonable for citizens to infer that a candidate who exhibits conservative policy preferences also hold conservative preferences on issues that she rarely or never publicly addresses. Citizens have no choice but to evaluate the candidates using the information that is available to them, information that is unlikely to cover all issues of interest.

Citizens should also feel more certain about their evaluations of candidates when they have access to more information. When people know very little about political candidates, they should feel uncertain about any attitudes they hold about them as they may be making little more than an educated guess about the candidates. By contrast, citizens who know a lot about a candidate should report feeling more certain because they should feel more confident about any evaluations they make than they might be if they had access to less information.

There are some conditions under which citizens may feel less certain about their evaluations even in the face of a large quantity of information. Candidates who take positions on issues that are congruent with a party of which they are not a member may surprise citizens during an election. For example, a Republican who takes a position in favor of gay marriage may confuse citizens because such a position is not at all congruent with the image many people hold of Republican candidates. Citizens should, therefore, feel less certain about the evaluations they make about candidates like this.

I test my theory of candidate evaluation by using two survey experiments, the first of which is described below.

Data and Methods

The first source of data for this study were collected from a sample of 613 survey experiment participants. Participants were undergraduates recruited from two introductory political science

courses at a large southeastern public university. Table 1 contains statistics describing the characteristics of the sample. Student samples suffer from a lack of representativeness, and this sample is no different. As expected in convenience samples of undergraduate students, the average age of participants is low at just under 19 years of age. The average number of years of education is also unsurprisingly high at 13.5. Participants were on average able to answer 2.8 of five political knowledge questions correctly.³

Women make up 64% of the sample. Participants were slightly more partisan than the general population; only 5% identified as independents. Nearly half (49%) of the sample identified themselves as liberals compared to just 36% who identified as conservatives. Nearly 80% of participants reported paying “a lot” or “some” attention to politics and just over 93% reported being “very much” or “somewhat” interested in politics.⁴

Table 1: Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min/max	N
Age	18.8	1.7	18/41	554
Years of education	13.5	.8	13/16	606
Political knowledge	2.8	1.3	0/5	606
Proportion				
Race				
African American	.11			
Asian	.04			
Hispanic	.05			
Native American	.02			
Other	.03			
White	.76			
Liberals	.49			
Conservatives	.36			
Democrats	.54			
Republicans	.41			
Female	.64			

Experimental Design

The survey was administered online. Participants completed the experiment at a time and place convenient to them during the collection period. Subjects first completed a pretest, part of which was devoted to collecting demographic information such as ethnicity, partisanship, level of

³ The political knowledge questions were as follows: (1) What job or political office does Harry Reid now hold? (2) What job or political office does Ben Bernanke now hold? (3) If no one running for President wins a majority of electoral votes, who becomes responsible for choosing the President? (4) The Supreme Court has the power to declare laws unconstitutional. What is this power called? (5) Who was the first woman nominated for Vice President by a major political party?

⁴ The high levels of reported attention and interest in politics should not be surprising given that the sample was drawn from students in political science classes.

education, and ideological disposition. Participants were also asked a series of political knowledge questions and were asked to rate their feelings towards a number of individuals and groups.

I operationalize my first dimension of clarity by creating statements that either do or do not contain political issue content. Those that do not contain issue content are inherently ambiguous; candidates who make these kinds of statements are avoiding issues. The categorization of messages that do contain issue content depend on their location on the second dimension. The messages I designed that contain issue content either do or do not contain a candidate’s position on the issue. Those that do not contain a position are considered to communicate an implicit position. Those that contain an explicit position are considered to be the least ambiguous type of message.

These types of messages can be ordered from most to least ambiguous: those that avoid issues, those that contain an implicit position, and those that contain an explicit position.

Table 2: Treatment Assignment

Treatment	N
Control	100
<i>Ambiguous messages</i>	
Owned issues	88
Unowned issues	78
<i>Precise messages</i>	
Owned issues and expected positions	91
Unowned issues and expected positions	70
Owned issues and unexpected positions	101
Unowned issues and unexpected positions	91

Next, participants were randomly assigned a treatment, which are summarized in Table 2. Each treatment contained four statements made by two fictional incumbent Senators who subjects were told recently ran for reelection: Senators Franklin (a Democrat) and Perkins (a Republican). I varied two characteristics of the candidates’ messages by treatment: their issue content and their level of ambiguity. Candidates either did or did not talk about political issues. If they did, they either took a position or they did not. Candidates took the positions expected of them based on their parties in some treatments and took surprising positions in others. They also talked about issues owned by their party in some treatments and talked about those owned by their opponents in other treatments.

When participants were assigned to a treatment group in which they saw statements containing issue content, they were exposed to statements about four different issues, two owned by each party. The Democratic owned issues were health care and affirmative action and the

Republican owned issues were taxes on the wealthy and national security.

The Democratic position on health care advocated greater government intervention while the Republican position advocated the protection of private health insurance. On affirmative action, the Democratic position argued in favor of continuing to enforce affirmative action; the Republican position on the issue suggested affirmative action should end. The Democratic position on taxes was that taxes on the rich were too low while the Republican position was that they were too high. Last, the Democratic position on national security argued in favor of greater diplomatic engagement with the rest of the world and suggests that some of the military's budget could be better spent in other ways. The Republican position on national security was that the military should be well funded.

Control group

Participants in this group were exposed to purely ambiguous messages. The candidates did not talk about issues nor did they take any positions in this treatment. These statements focused on the candidates' personal qualities and on non-partisan performance issues. This is the group that I will use to compare to my other treatment groups when I test most of my expectations.

Owned issues and ambiguous positions

The messages participants were exposed to in this group contained issue content but no position was identified. The Democratic candidate talked about Democratic issues and the Republican candidate talked about Republican issues.

Unowned issues and ambiguous positions

Subjects in this group received the same messages as those in the last group, but this time the Democratic issue statements were attributed to the Republican candidate and vice versa. Neither candidate takes a position.

Owned issues and expected positions

The Democratic candidate's statements are about Democratic issues and a Democratic position is identified in each. Similarly, the statements attributed to the Republican candidate are about Republican-owned issues and the position taken is a Republican position.

Unowned issues and expected positions

Candidates in this treatment talked about issues owned by their opponents but took a position in line with their own parties. The Democratic (Republican) candidate talked about Republican (Democratic) owned issues and took a Democratic (Republican) position.

Owned issues and unexpected positions

In this treatment, the candidates talked about owned issues in their statements, but took a surprising position on them. The Democratic (Republican) candidate talked about Democratic (Republican) owned issues and took a Republican (Democratic) position on them.

Unowned issues and unexpected positions

The messages subjects were shown in this this treatment contained issue mentions, but the issues the candidates talked about were those owned by the opposition. In addition, they took positions on these issues in line with their opponents. In other words, the Democratic (Republican) candidate talked about Republican (Democratic) owned issues and took a Republican (Democratic) position on them.

After reading the statements made by the fictional Senators, participants were asked to evaluate the ideologies and issue positions of the candidates. Ideology was coded one to seven, with one meaning “very liberal” and seven meaning “very conservative.” Issue positions were measured on an 11 point scale with low values indicating very strong Democratic positions and high values indicating staunch Republican positions.⁵ In addition to questions asking participants to evaluate the positions of the candidates on the four issues that they may have talked about, subjects were also asked to place the candidates on two issues that were never discussed: abortion and government services.⁶ Including these issues in the survey experiment allows me to test whether or not citizens infer the positions candidates hold on issues they do

⁵ Health care: On a scale of one to eleven, with one meaning “the government should provide health insurance to all citizens” and eleven meaning “the government should ensure that health care is available to its citizens through private insurers,” where would you place (candidate) on the issue of health care reform? Aid to blacks: On a scale of one to eleven, with one meaning “the government should help blacks” and eleven meaning “blacks should help themselves,” where would you place (candidate) on the issue of aid to blacks? Taxation of the wealthy: On a scale of one to eleven, with one meaning “taxes on the wealthy should be greatly increased” and eleven meaning “taxes on the wealthy should be greatly decreased,” where would you place Democratic Senator Franklin on the issue of taxation of the wealthy? Defense spending: On a scale of one to eleven, with one meaning “defense spending should be greatly decreased” and eleven meaning “defense spending should be greatly increased,” where would you place Democratic Senator Franklin on the issue of defense spending?

⁶ Government services: On a scale of one to eleven, with one meaning “the government should provide many more services” and eleven meaning “the government should provide many fewer services,” where would you place Democratic Senator Franklin on the issue of government services? Abortion: On a scale of one to eleven, with one meaning “by law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice” and eleven meaning “by law, abortion should never be permitted,” where would you place Democratic Senator Franklin on the issue of abortion?

not discuss based on the issues they do talk about.⁷

Following Alvarez and Franklin (1994), participants were asked to evaluate how certain they were about their evaluations immediately proceeding each evaluative question.⁸ The question was worded “On a scale of one to seven, with one meaning ‘very certain’ and seven meaning ‘very uncertain,’ how certain are you?”

Expectations

I expect that participants who are exposed to either of the ambiguous issue position treatments will evaluate candidates as being more liberal relative to the evaluations made by members of the control group if the issues they discuss are owned by the Democratic Party. Similarly, I expect the evaluations reported by participants to be more conservative than those made by subjects receiving the control treatment if the issues are owned by the Republican Party. Further, I expect participants who are exposed to any of the four treatments containing precise statements of the Senators’ positions on issues to evaluate the candidates’ as being either more liberal or more conservative relative to those who are given the control treatment. The predicted direction of these evaluations are determined by the party that the stated issue positions are congruent with; if the positions on issues are in line with the Democratic (Republican) Party, I expect the average evaluation of a Senator’s ideology to be more liberal (conservative) than the average ideological evaluation made by members of the control group.

My expectations for the effect of the experimental treatments on participants’ evaluations of the candidates’ issue positions is similar. In the treatments containing ambiguous positions, I expect participants to evaluate the Senators as holding issue positions more in line with the party that owns the issues they discuss relative to participants who were assigned the control treatment. I expect the treatments containing explicit positions on issues to induce participants to evaluate the Senators as holding more extreme positions on issues in the direction of the position, meaning that I expect participants to evaluate a Senator as holding positions more congruent with the Democratic (Republican) party when the Senator’s statements contain Democratic (Republican) positions. I also expect participants to react to the treatments in the same way when evaluating the Senators’ positions both on the issues they talk about and on those they avoid.

I expect that the level of certainty participants report feeling about their ideological and positional evaluations will increase as the amount of information they have about the Senators

⁷ I report the means and standard deviations of the evaluations made by participants about both candidates in Table 6 in the appendix.

⁸ Note though that I use a seven point certainty scale while Franklin and Alvarez recommend a three point scale. I do so to avoid censoring variation in feelings of certainty.

increases. This means that I expect participants who receive all of the experimental treatments will report feeling more certain on average than will those who received the control treatment.

Last, I expect participants who receive a treatment in which the Senators take positions congruent with their party to feel more certain about their evaluations than participants who were exposed to a treatment in which the Senators took surprising positions on issues.

Table 3: Expected Signs of Treatment Dummies' Estimated Coefficients in the First Experiment

	Ideology	Issue Positions	Certainty
<i>Ambiguous messages</i>			
Owned issues	+	+	+
Unowned issues	-	-	+
<i>Precise messages</i>			
Owned issues and expected positions	+	+	+
Unowned issues and expected positions	+	+	+
Owned issues and unexpected positions	-	-	+
Unowned issues and unexpected positions	-	-	+

Note: The signs in the “certainty” column refer to certainty about both ideology and issue positions.

Table 3 contains the expected signs of the estimated coefficients produced by each of the following OLS models. Note that the predicted signs contained in the last column refer to certainty about both ideological and positional evaluations.

Results

I first examine how the issue and positional content of campaign messages affects participants' evaluations of and certainty about candidate ideology. I then examine evaluations of candidates' perceived positions and the certainty participants reported feeling about these positions on issues.

The standard way to report the differences between groups is through difference of means tests. While the simplicity provided by the difference of means test is appealing, I opt instead to make use of OLS models using only dummy variables indicating whether or not a participant was in a given treatment group as covariates. A dummy for the control group was left out of the models.

I report the results of these models graphically using ropeladder plots with estimated coefficients represented by points and 95% confidence intervals represented by lines drawn through the points. A vertical dashed line represents zero. If a confidence interval crosses this vertical line it indicates that the estimated coefficient is not significantly ($p = .05$) different than zero, i.e. the evaluation or feeling of certainty made by those who received a treatment is not on average

different than that made by participants who received the control treatment. If the confidence intervals of any two treatment groups overlap, it indicates that they are not significantly different from one another at the .05 level.

Respondents are pooled in the following analyses. Each respondent's evaluation of both candidates is included in each analysis. Ideological and issue placements were transformed from their original scale. Ideology is still measured on a seven point scale, but high values now indicate that the respondent evaluated the Senator as holding an ideology in line with their party. Low values indicate that respondents evaluated the Senator as having an ideology that was not in line with their party. These values range from -3 to 3. For example, if a respondent evaluated a Republican as being very conservative (a 7 on the original scale), this value will be 3 on the new scale because Republicans are generally expected to be conservative. If this same Republican was evaluated as being very liberal (a 1 on the original scale), the value of the evaluation on the new scale is a -3, because status as a liberal is associated with the Democratic Party. Democrats who were evaluated as being very conservative were given values of -3 on the new scale. This is because status as a conservative is not the expected ideological position for Democratic politicians to hold. Those who were evaluated as being very liberal received a value of 3 because liberalism is the expected ideological position of their party. When participants evaluated Senators as being moderate (a 4 on the original scale), they received a value of 0 on the new scale.⁹

The candidates' perceived positions on issues were similarly recoded, but on an 11 point scale. Once again, high values indicate that participants believed that the Senators held positions on an issue that were in line with their own parties while low values indicated that they held positions more in line with the other political party. These values are rescaled from 1 to 11 to -5 to 5.¹⁰

Positive coefficients therefor indicate that participants receiving a given treatment evaluated candidates as holding ideological and issue positions more in line with their parties than did those who received the control treatment. Negative coefficients indicate that participants who received a treatment on average indicated the candidates as having ideological and issue positions that were less congruent with their parties than did the respondents who received the control treatment.

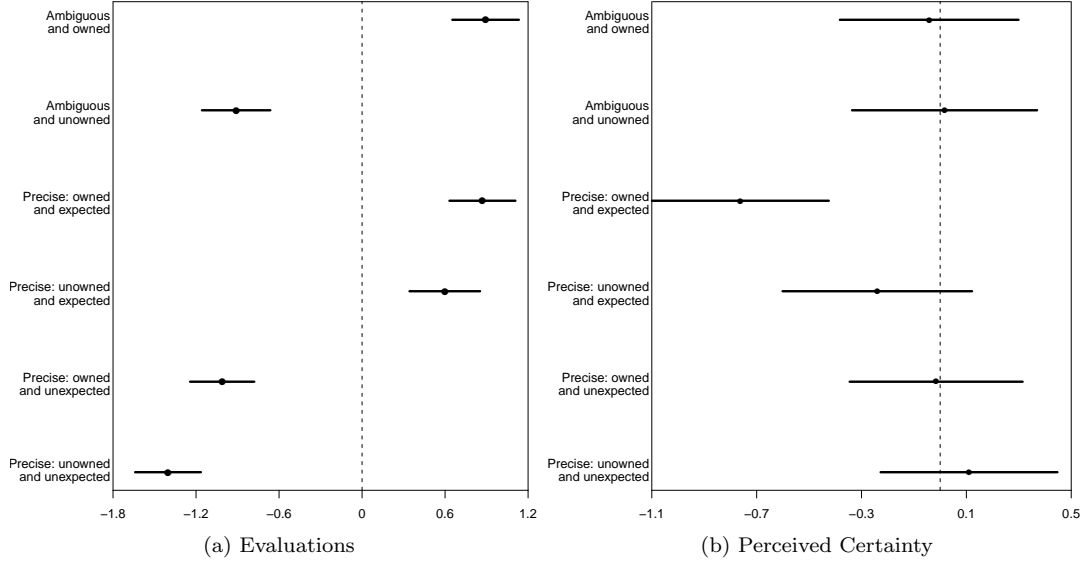
I also pool participants' feelings of certainty about their ideological and issue position evaluations. These remain on the same scale. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents who recieved a given treatment were less certain about their evaluations while negative coefficients

⁹ For Republicans: Ideology - 4
For Democrats: $-1 * (\text{Ideology} - 4)$

¹⁰ For Republicans: Position - 6
For Democrats: $-1 * (\text{Position} - 6)$

indicate that participants were more certain on average than were the people who received the control treatment.

Candidate Ideology



Note: Estimated OLS coefficients are plotted along with 95% confidence intervals. For Panel (a): $N = 1,223$, adjusted $R^2 = .365$, and $F = 118.2$. The model's constant is equal to 0.794 with a standard error of 0.082. Robust standard errors were calculated. For Panel (b): $N = 1,217$, adjusted $R^2 = .023$, and $F = 5.67$. The model's constant is equal to 3.99 with a standard error of 0.12.

Fig. 1: Perceptions of and Certainty about the Hypothetical Senators' Ideologies

I model participants' evaluations of the candidates' ideologies and plot the estimated coefficients along with the 95% confidence intervals in Panel (a) of Figure 1.¹¹ There is strong evidence that participants' evaluations of the candidates' ideologies were affected by the content of the messages to which they were exposed. Participants who received an experimental treatment evaluated the candidates' ideologies as being significantly different ($p \leq .05$) on average than did those who received the control treatment. Participants who received treatments in which the candidates talked about issues that were not owned by their party or who took surprising positions on issues were on average evaluated as holding different ideologies than were candidates who talked about issues that their parties owned or who took positions congruent with their parties. Participants who received one of the former treatments tended to evaluate the Senators as holding ideological positions that were better aligned with the other party than with their own, meaning that they evaluated the Democratic (Republican) candidate as being more

¹¹ A test for heteroscedasticity produced a χ^2 value of 52.62 ($p \leq .05$), indicating the presence of non-constant variance. The inclusion of robust standard errors does not substantively alter the findings suggested by this model.

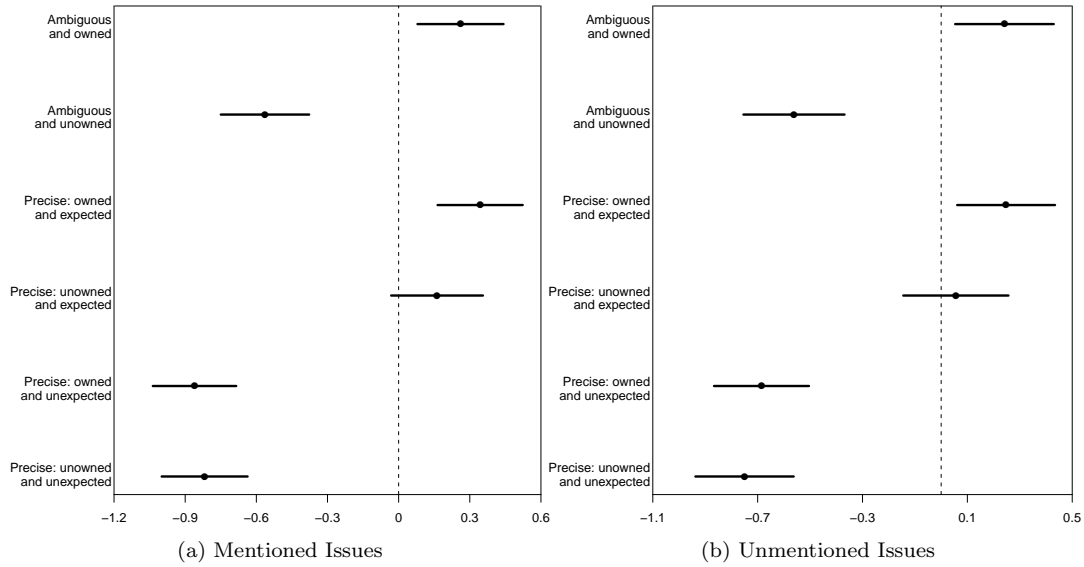
conservative (liberal) on average than did participants who received one of the latter treatments.

I report the results of a model of participants' reported feelings of certainty about their ideological evaluations of the candidates on their exposure to the treatments and plot the results in Panel (b) of Figure 1. There is little systematic evidence that participants became more (or less) certain about their evaluations when exposed to treatments in which the candidates talked about issues and took positions. The only treatment which was able to induce participants to report a significantly different feeling of certainty than those in the control group was that in which the candidates talked about issues owned by their party and took expected positions on the issues. Participants who received this treatment on average felt more certain about their ideological evaluations of the candidates than did those who received the control treatment. They also reported feeling more certain than did participants who received all but one of the experimental treatments, the exception being the group which received messages from Senators about issues that their party did not own and who took positions congruent with their parties.

Candidate Issue Position

Next I examine the effect of campaign message content on evaluations of candidates' issue positions using ordinary least squares regression. I first created factor scores using principle components factor analysis for each candidate using participants' evaluations of the candidates' positions on (1) each of the four mentioned issues and (2) each of the two unmentioned issues. Both factors were calculated using principle components factor analysis and thus had means of zero and standard deviations of one. High factor scores indicate that the candidate was evaluated as holding issue positions in line with their party while low scores are indicative of evaluations that are congruent with the other party. I model these factor scores as a function of a series of dummy variables indicating whether or not a participant was in each of the treatment groups. I have again omitted a dummy for the control group, the effect of which is absorbed into the constant.

I plot the results of these regressions in Figure 2. Panel (a) shows the results of the model of the model of participants' evaluations of the candidates on the issues that they talk about while Panel (b) reports their evaluations of the Senators' positions on issues that they do not talk about. The pattern of the results produced by both models are similar and indicate that on average participants in all but one of the treatment groups evaluated the candidates' positions on issues differently than did those in the control group. Participants who received the treatment containing statements about unowned issues with positions in line with the parties of the candidates on average made evaluations that were statistically indistinguishable from those made by subjects who received the control treatment.

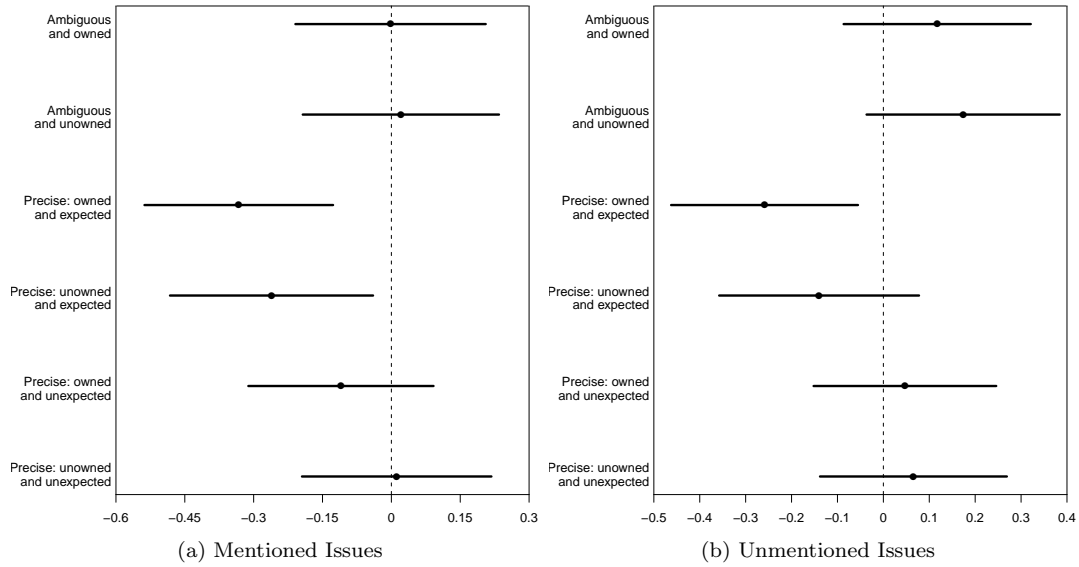


Note: Estimated OLS coefficients are plotted along with 95% confidence intervals. For Panel (a): $N = 1,183$, adjusted $R^2 = .234$, and $F = 61.12$. The model's constant is equal to 0.223 with a standard error of 0.064. For Panel (b): $N = 1,198$, adjusted $R^2 = .166$, and $F = 40.59$. The model's intercept is equal to 0.216 and has a standard error of 0.066.

Fig. 2: Perceived Positions of the Hypothetical Senators on Issues

Participants receiving a treatment in which the Senators talked about issues that their party owned and either took expected positions or were vague about their positions tended to evaluate the Senators as holding positions more congruent with their party on issues than did those in the control group. The evaluations made by these two groups are statistically indistinguishable from one another. Subjects who received a treatment in which the Senators either took an unexpected position or talked about unowned issues without taking a position on average evaluated the Senator as holding more conservative positions than did those receiving the control treatment. The evaluations made by these three groups are also indistinguishable from one another, but they are significantly different from those made by the latter two groups.

Next I examine the level of certainty perceived by participants about their evaluations of the candidates' positions on both mentioned and unmentioned issues. I again estimated factor scores using principle components factor analysis. The higher the factor score, the less certain a respondent is estimated as being. These factors again had means of zero and a standard deviations of one.



Note: Estimated OLS coefficients are plotted along with 95% confidence intervals. For Panel (a): $N = 1,169$, adjusted $R^2 = .013$, and $F = 3.48$. The model's constant is equal to 0.093 with a standard error of 0.073 . For Panel (b): $N = 1,190$, adjusted $R^2 = .014$, and $F = 3.79$. The model produces a constant of -0.003 and a standard error of 0.071 .

Fig. 3: Certainty About Perceived Positions of the Hypothetical Senators on Issues

I plot the estimated ordinary least squares coefficients produced by the models in Figure 3. Once again, there is limited evidence that the information contained in the treatments affected participants' feelings of certainty about the evaluations of the Senators. In the case of the candidates' positions on issues that they discussed, the results for which are presented in Panel (a), those who received the treatment in which the Senators talked about issues owned by their party and then took positions congruent with their parties were the only group who reported feeling more certain on average than did the respondents who received the control treatment. This group was also significantly more confident than were respondents who received the other experimental treatments with one exception: those who saw messages about issues that were unowned by the Senators' parties and in which the Senators took positions in line with their parties. The model for unmentioned issues presented in Panel (b) shows similar results, though note that in this case the only treatment that induced a significantly greater level of certainty from those who were exposed to it relative to those who received the control treatment was the one in which the Senators talked about issues that were owned by and took positions congruent with their parties.

Summary

I presented strong evidence that the content of candidates' statements affects citizens' evaluations of their ideologies. Candidates who talk about Democratic issues are systematically

evaluated as being more liberal while those who talk about Republican issues are identified as being more conservative than candidates who avoid issues and position taking. The ideologies of candidates who both talk about issues and take a position are evaluated based on the direction of the position; a Democratic position leads to more liberal ideological evaluations while a Republican position causes more conservative ideological evaluations.

There is also evidence that the content of candidates' statements affect the evaluations citizens make about candidates' issue positions. For the most part, candidates who either talked about issues or talked about issues and took positions on those issues were evaluated as holding positions that were more extreme than were those who did not talk about issues. The direction of this extremity was determined in the case of the former by the party that owns the issue while the latter was determined by the party that holds the position identified as being held by the candidates.¹²

Evaluations of candidates' ideologies and aggregated issue positions are uniformly and significantly different from one another when comparing those who were exposed to statements in which candidates took positions congruent with their parties with those who read statements containing incongruent issue positions. All of the signs of these differences and coefficients were correctly predicted.

There is very little evidence that the issue and positional content of campaign messages affected participants' certainty about their evaluations. Participants who received a treatment in which the Senators talked about issues that their parties owned and took positions congruent with their parties were more certain about both their ideological and issue position evaluations than were those who received the control treatment. The remaining experimental treatments did not induce responses that were different on average than were those given by members of the control group.

Reassessing Certainty

Next, I present the results of a second and smaller experiment that I designed which builds on the first. It is possible that the people who participated in the first experiment did not feel more certain about their evaluations of the Senators simply because they received so little information about them. It may be unreasonable to expect that two short statements made by unknown politicians will create a strong enough stimulus to make people feel certain about the way in which they evaluated the candidates. I take this into account in my second experiment

¹² It may be of interest to note that Democrats did not evaluate either of the fictional Senators in different ways than did Republicans.

by greatly increasing the amount of information present in the experimental treatments. Table 4 shows the number of participants who were randomly assigned to each treatment group.

Table 4: Treatment Assignment

Treatment	N
Control	27
<i>Weak signal</i>	
Owned issues	34
Unowned issues	28
<i>Strong signal</i>	
Owned issues and expected positions	22
Unowned issues and expected positions	25

The control treatment was identical to that of the previous experiment: two fairly vacuous statements made by each Senator devoid of issue content. The experimental treatments that participants were exposed to in this experiment contained significantly more information than did those in the previous one. Rather than merely reading two statements from each candidate, participants in my second experiment read either four or eight statements that were attributed to each candidate. Participants who read four statements made by each candidate received a “weak signal” treatment while those who read eight per Senator received a “strong signal” treatment. The candidates talked about issues and took positions in all of the experimental treatments. The Senators talked about the same issues as in the last experiment: aid to Blacks, health care, taxes, and national defense. Respondents were asked to assess the Senators’ ideologies and issue positions on these issues and on abortion and government services. Depending on the treatment, the Senators either talked about issues their party owns or issues that the opposing party owns. The positions they took were determined by the ownership of the issues; when they talked about Democratic issues, they took Democratic positions and vice versa for Republican owned issues.¹³

Next, I report the results of each of the tests that I presented when discussing the first experiment. Again, I pool participants’ evaluations of and certainty about the Senators’ ideological and issue positions. I make use of OLS regression and only use dummies indicating whether or not a participant was in a given experimental treatment as covariates. For ideological and issue evaluations, remember that positive coefficients indicate that people receiving that treatment evaluated Democrats (Republicans) as being more liberal (conservative) ideologically and as holding a position more in line with the Democratic (Republican) Party on issues relative to the

¹³ Due to limitations in the size of my sample, I was unable to include treatments in which, for example, a Democratic Senator talked about Republican owned issues but took Democratic positions on them.

evaluations made by those who were in the control group. Positive coefficients indicate just the opposite. In the certainty models, negative coefficients indicate that participants who received a given treatment were more certain about their evaluations than were those who were in the control group. Negative coefficients indicate that they were less certain about their evaluations.

I expect that participants who receive an experimental treatment will evaluate the Senators as having more liberal (conservative) ideologies and Democratic (Republican) positions on issues when they talk about Democratic (Republican) owned issues and, by tacit, take Democratic (Republican) positions on the issues. I further expect that participants who are exposed to any of the experimental treatments will report being more certain about their evaluations of the Senators' ideologies and issue positions than will those who are members of the control group.

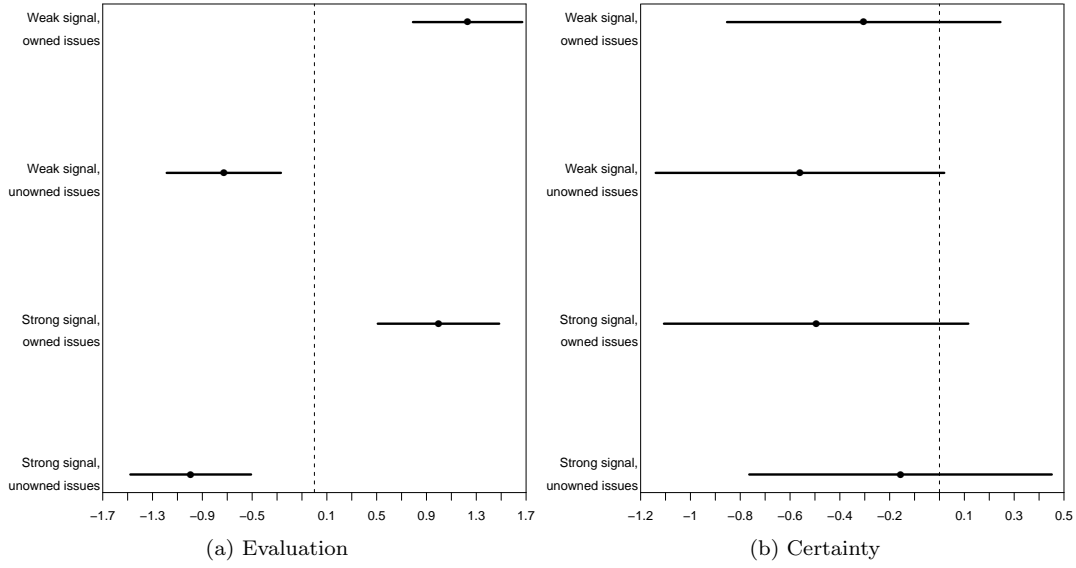
Table 5: Expected Signs of Treatment Dummies' Estimated Coefficients in the Second Experiment

	Ideology	Issue Positions	Certainty
<i>Weak signal</i>			
Owned issues	+	+	+
Unowned issues	-	-	+
<i>Strong signal</i>			
Owned issues and expected positions	+	+	+
Unowned issues and unexpected positions	-	-	+

Note: The signs in the "certainty" column refer to certainty about both ideology and issue positions.

Table 5 contains the expected signs of the estimated coefficients produced by each of the following models. Note once again that the signs contained in the last column refer to certainty about both ideological and positional evaluations.

I report the results of two regressions predicting participants' evaluations of the Senators' ideologies and the level of certainty they feel about their evaluations in Figure 4. Panel (a) shows that the evaluations of the Senators' ideologies made by participants who received an experimental treatment were, on average, significantly ($p \leq .05$) different than were those made by the people in the control group. Participants receiving the experimental treatments also evaluated the Senators as being more liberal (conservative) when they talked about Democratic (Republican) owned issues and took Democratic (Republican) positions on them. Further, participants who were exposed to messages in which the Senators talked about positions that were owned by their party evaluated them differently than did those who received treatments in which the Senators talked about issues that were not owned by their party.



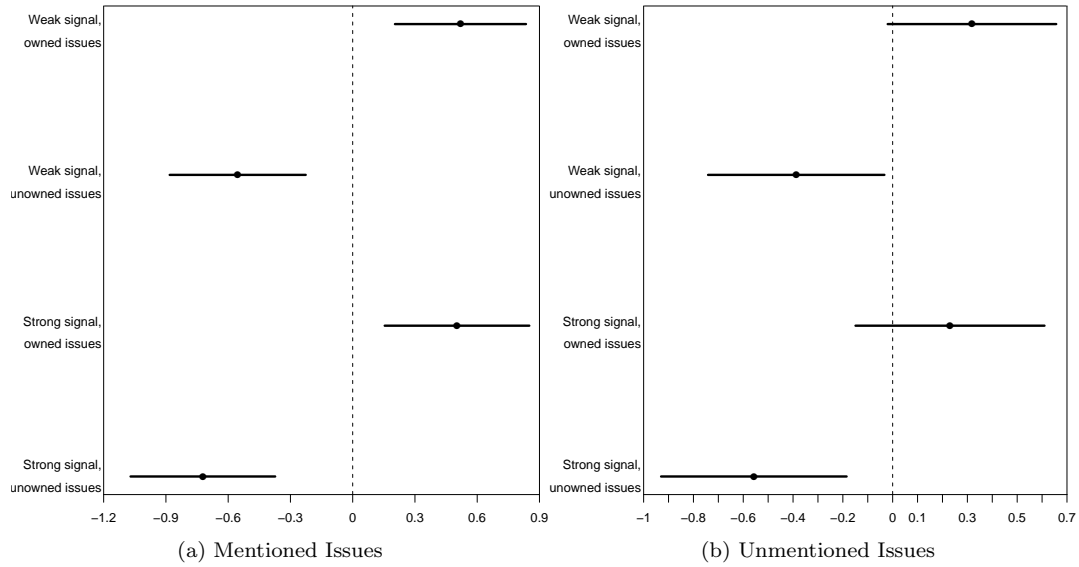
Note: Estimated OLS coefficients are plotted along with 95% confidence intervals. For panel (a): $N = 264$, adjusted $R^2 = .351$, and $F = 36.6$. The model's constant is equal to 0.549 with a standard error of 0.169. For panel (b): $N = 264$, adjusted $R^2 = .003$, and $F = 1.18$. The model's constant is equal to 4.25 with a standard error of 0.21.

Fig. 4: Perceptions of and Certainty about the Hypothetical Candidates' Ideologies

Panel (b) of Figure 4 shows the results of the certainty model. None of the coefficients produced by the experimental treatment dummies are significant at the traditional level of .05, though note that the p-value produced by a two tailed test of significance for the weak signal and unowned issues treatment is .059, a finding suggestive that participants receiving that treatment may have been more certain on average about their evaluations than were those who were members of the control group. My inability to find significant results in this model may mean that people are generally uncertain about the ideologies of politicians, that I am still not providing them with enough information, that my sample size is not large enough, or any combination of these possibilities.

I report the results of models predicting participants' evaluations of the Senators' positions on issues that they do and do not talk about in Panel (a) and (b), respectively, of Figure 5. I once again created factor scores for both mentioned and unmentioned issues using principle components factor analysis, both of which had means of zero and standard deviations of one.¹⁴ Participants' evaluations of the Senators' positions on the various issues all loaded on a single dimension.

¹⁴ As in the previous experiment, the issues the Senators mention are aid to Blacks, health care, taxes, and national defense. The issues they did not mention were abortion and government services.



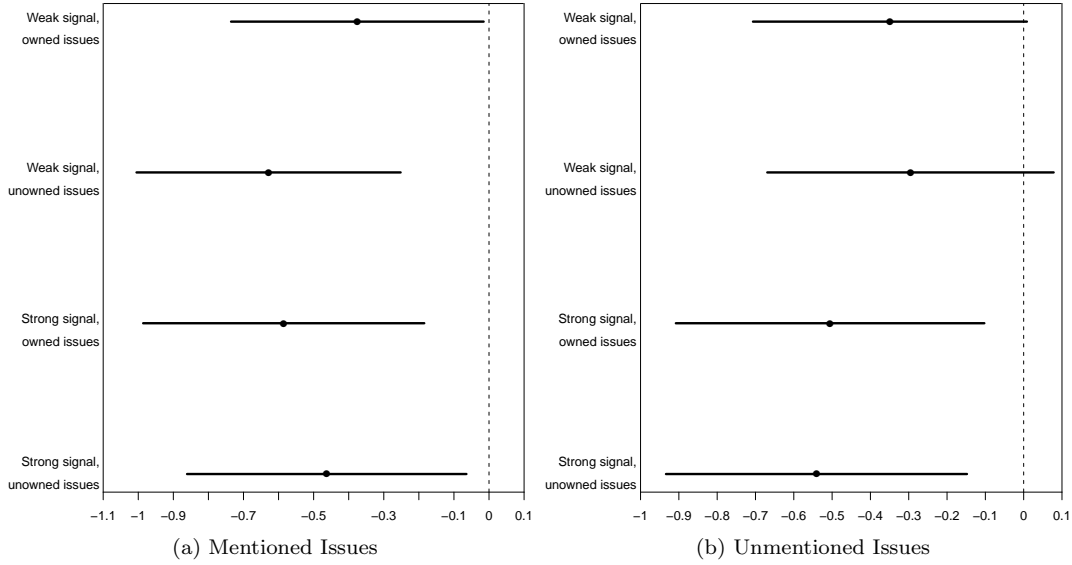
Note: Estimated OLS coefficients are plotted along with 95% confidence intervals. For Panel (a): $N = 261$, adjusted $R^2 = .253$, and $F = 23.07$. The model's constant is equal to 0.025 with a standard error of 0.121. For Panel (b): $N = 267$, adjusted $R^2 = .103$, and $F = 8.62$. The model's constant is equal to 0.059 with a standard error of 0.129.

Fig. 5: Perceived Positions of the Hypothetical Candidates on Issues

Panel (a) of Figure 5 shows that participants who received an experimental treatment in which the candidates talked about issues owned by their party and took positions on those issues in line with their parties evaluated the Senators as holding positions more in line with their party on average than did those who were part of the control group. Participants who received a treatment in which the Senators talked about issues that were not owned by their party and took positions expected to be held by members of the opposing party were evaluated as being out of line with their parties relative to the evaluations made by the members of the control group, as indicated by the negative coefficients produced by the model for both of the unowned issue dummies. The coefficients for the two owned issues treatment groups are significantly different from those produced by the two unowned issue treatment groups, though the treatments making up each of these subgroups are not significantly different than one another.

Panel (b) of Figure 5 shows the results for the model of participants' evaluations of the Senators' positions on issues that they do not discuss. These results show a similar pattern to those reported in Panel (a), though each treatment's coefficient is not significantly different from zero. Note once again that the coefficients all have the expected sign and that the treatments in which the Senators talked about and took surprising positions on issues that were not owned by their parties on average induced participants to evaluate the Senators as holding positions more out of line with their parties than did those who received the control treatment. The 95% confidence intervals produced by the owned issues treatment dummies both cross zero, indicating

that they are indistinguishable from the evaluations made by the control group at the traditional (.05) level of significance. Still, note that the weak signal and owned issues coefficient produced a p-value of .066, a value that would likely to be lower had I had a similar number of participants in this experiment as I had in the last.



Note: Estimated OLS coefficients are plotted along with 95% confidence intervals. For Panel (a): $N = 259$, $\text{adjusted } R^2 = .034$, and $F = 3.25$. The model's constant is equal to 0.406 with a standard error of 0.139. For Panel (b): $N = 264$, $\text{adjusted } R^2 = .02$, and $F = 2.32$. The model's constant is equal to 0.327 with a standard error of 0.137.

Fig. 6: Certainty About Perceived Positions of the Hypothetical Candidates on Issues

Figure 6 displays the results of two models predicting participants' feelings of certainty about their evaluations of the Senators' positions on both issues that they talked about (Panel (a)) and issues that they avoided (Panel (b)).¹⁵ All of the coefficients for the experimental treatment dummies plotted in Panel (a) are negative and significantly different than the average feeling of certainty reported by members of the control group. This indicates that participants who were exposed to an experimental treatment felt more certain about their perceptions of where the candidates stood on the issues that were discussed in the statements they read.

The coefficients plotted in Panel (b) are also all negative, though they are not all significantly ($p \leq .05$) different than zero. Participants who received one of the experimental treatments in which they read eight statements made by each candidate (the "strong signal" groups) felt more certain about their evaluations of the Senators' positions on issues that were not mentioned than

¹⁵ The dependent variables in these models are factors once again produced by use of principle components factor analysis which have means of zero and standard deviations of one. In Panel (a), certainty about each Senator's position on aid to Blacks, health care, taxes, and national defense are combined into a factor while in Panel (b), the issues are abortion and government services. Certainty about the Senators' positions on the issues loads onto a single factor in both cases.

did members of the control group. The two sided p-value produced by the coefficient for the weak signal and owned issue treatment is .057, a value that is highly suggestive that those who received this treatment were on average more certain about their evaluations of the Senators' positions on unmentioned issues than were those who received the control treatment.¹⁶

These results provide evidence that the informational content of candidates' statements can influence the certainty with which citizens judge their evaluations of the candidates' positions on political issues, sometimes even on issues that the candidates avoid talking about.

Conclusion

It is clear that citizens respond to campaign messages in predictable ways when evaluating the ideologies of candidates. The issues candidates discuss and the positions they take on these issues affect the way in which citizens view candidates. The implications are twofold. First, this implies that citizens are able to process the information being distributed by candidates during campaigns and that this information affects their ideological perceptions of politicians. This suggests that campaigns matter. Second, strategic candidates can influence the perceptions citizens have about their ideologies by choosing to talk about issues that will help them win elections. A very liberal candidate in a conservative district may be better served by talking about Republican owned rather than Democratic owned issues in an attempt to paint themselves as being more conservative than they might otherwise be perceived.¹⁷

The evidence on issue positions suggests a similar conclusion: the issues that candidates talk about and the positions they take affect citizens' evaluations of their issue positions. It is possible that ideological evaluations are easier to influence than are the positions of candidates, especially when evaluations are asked to be made on an abstract eleven point scale.

There is less systematic evidence that talking about issues and taking positions makes citizens more certain about the ideological and positional evaluations they make relative to evaluations of candidates who avoid issues. Perhaps this was a function of the experimental prompt, which only gave participants a few sentences worth of information on which to base their evaluations. It is also possible that certainty builds over the course of a campaign as citizens are exposed to more and more campaign messages and other political stimuli. An alternative explanation is that politics is inherently ambiguous, thus citizens are nearly always uncertain about their political perceptions.

Perhaps the most interesting finding of this study is that citizens make inferences about

¹⁶ This coefficient may also have fallen victim to my relatively small sample size.

¹⁷ It is possible, however, that candidates may only be able to go so far before they strain their credibility.

the positions candidates hold on issues that they do not talk about by using information that they have access to: the issues candidates talk about and the positions they explicate. In other words, citizens are able to translate conservative (liberal) positions on a number of issues into an assumption that a candidate likely holds a conservative (liberal) position on other issues that they have ignored. This behavior implies that candidates may be able to manipulate citizens into believing that they have an ideology or hold positions that they do not, but this method of inference is not without merit. It is a reasonable strategy that provides people with an informational shortcut when evaluating candidates. Citizens will no doubt make mistakes, but political elites often exhibit higher levels of ideological constraint relative to members of the electorate, which assures that the inferences citizens make are not entirely baseless.

Future research might focus on how citizens' evaluations of the ideological and issue positions of candidates is affected by the content of messages from sources other than the candidates themselves. This information could come from their opponents, the parties, interest groups, or the media. If panel data is available, it may be productive to examine how certainty varies as Election Day draws near and as media exposure increases.

APPENDIX

The First Experiment

Those who participated in the first experiment read the following text before being exposed to their treatment condition:

I am going to show you several statement made by two Senators during their recent campaigns for reelection. Senator Franklin is a Democrat and Senator Perkins is a Republican. Please read the following statements. When you are done, please let me know and we will move on to the final set of questions.

- **Control group**

- Democratic Senator Franklin

- * “America is the greatest country in the world, and I intend to keep it that way. Send me back to Washington so I can keep fighting for you and our families.”
 - * “I have been a successful leader for my entire life and I will continue to be a leader in the United States Senate well into the next decade.”

- Republican Senator Perkins

- * “I’m on your side and always have been. I have and will continue to fight against special interests and Washington’s culture of corruption and incompetence.”
 - * “My record of public service is second to none. I have served this great state for many years and, with your blessing, will continue to uphold our ideals in Washington.”

- **Ambiguous messages about owned issues**

- Democratic Senator Franklin

- * “Affirmative action is an important issue in this campaign. I will be devoting a great deal of attention to it in the coming months.”
 - * “Health care is high on my agenda. I can assure you that I will devote a great deal of attention to this issue in the future.”

- Republican Senator Perkins

- * “We have serious problems with our system of taxation in this country. I know that this is a key issue in the minds of many in this great state and I want you all to know that I will make fixing these problems a priority.”
- * “Nothing is more important to me than national security. The safety of American citizens is always at the forefront of my mind.”

- **Ambiguous message about unowned issues**

- Democratic Senator Franklin

- * “We have serious problems with our system of taxation in this country. I know that this is a key issue in the minds of many in this great state and I want you all to know that I will make fixing these problems a priority.”
- * “Nothing is more important to me than national security. The safety of American citizens is always at the forefront of my mind.”

- Republican Senator Perkins

- * “Affirmative action is an important issue in this campaign. I will be devoting a great deal of attention to it in the coming months.”
- * “Health care is high on my agenda. I can assure you that I will devote a great deal of attention to this issue in the future.”

- **Owned issues with expected positions**

- Democratic Senator Franklin

- * “Affirmative action is an important issue in this campaign. The government must ensure that affirmative action policies are enforced so that we may continue to redress the problems caused by slavery and racism during America’s past.”
- * “Health care is high on my agenda. I can assure you that I will introduce and support legislation seeking to ensure that all Americans are provided adequate medical care regardless of their financial situations.”

- Republican Senator Perkins

- * “We have serious problems with our system of taxation in this country. Our system is complicated and our tax rates are far too high. I will make reducing the burden of taxes on American and simplifying our tax code my priorities.”
- * “Nothing is more important to me than national security. Because the safety of American citizens is always at the forefront of my mind, I will continue to support a strong and well funded military capable of defending us from foreign threats.”

- **Unowned issues and expected positions**

- Democratic Senator Franklin

- * “We have serious problems with our system of taxation in this country. Our system is complicated and our tax rates for the rich are far too low. I will make reducing the burden of taxes on ordinary Americans and simplifying our tax code my priorities.”
 - * “Nothing is more important to me than national security. Because the safety of American citizens is always at the forefront of my mind, I will press for a greater diplomatic engagement with the international community. Some of the military’s budget could be better spent in other ways.”

- Republican Senator Perkins

- * “Affirmative action is an important issue in this campaign. The government must end these policies as they have long since become unfair.”
 - * “Health care is high on my agenda. I can assure you that I will introduce and support legislation seeking to protect our current system of privatized health care. Competition is key and a government sponsored health care system would be the shake the foundations of American capitalism.”

- **Owned issues and unexpected positions**

- Democratic Senator Franklin

- * “Affirmative action is an important issue in this campaign. The government must end these policies as they have long since become unfair.”
 - * “Health care is high on my agenda. I can assure you that I will introduce and support legislation seeking to protect our current system of privatized health care. Competition is key and a government sponsored health care system would be the shake the foundations of American capitalism.”

- Republican Senator Perkins

- * “We have serious problems with our system of taxation in this country. Our system is complicated and our tax rates for the rich are far too low. I will make reducing the burden of taxes on ordinary Americans and simplifying our tax code my priorities.”
 - * “Nothing is more important to me than national security. Because the safety of American citizens is always at the forefront of my mind, I will press for a greater

diplomatic engagement with the international community. Some of the military's budget could be better spent in other ways."

- **Unowned issues and unexpected positions**

- Democratic Senator Franklin

- * "We have serious problems with our system of taxation in this country. Our system is complicated and our tax rates are far too high. I will make reducing the burden of taxes on American and simplifying our tax code my priorities."

- * "Nothing is more important to me than national security. Because the safety of American citizens is always at the forefront of my mind, I will continue to support a strong and well funded military capable of defending us from foreign threats."

- Republican Senator Perkins

- * "Affirmative action is an important issue in this campaign. The government must ensure that affirmative action policies are enforced so that we may continue to redress the problems caused by slavery and racism during America's past."

- * "Health care is high on my agenda. I can assure you that I will introduce and support legislation seeking to ensure that all Americans are provided adequate medical care regardless of their financial situations."

The Second Experiment

The following are the statements attributed to the fictional Senators to which participants in the second experiment were exposed.

Control

This treatment contains only references to non-political issues.

- "America is the greatest country in the world, and I intend to keep it that way. Send me back to Washington so I can keep fighting for you and our families."
- "I have been a successful leader for my entire life and I will continue to be a leader in the United States Senate well into the next decade."
- "I'm on your side and always have been. I have and will continue to fight against special interests and Washington's culture of corruption and incompetence."
- "My record of public service is second to none. I have served this great state for many years and, with your blessing, will continue to uphold our ideals in Washington."

Participants receiving one of these treatments will be exposed to each of the eight of the following statements. If they are in the “weak and owned” treatment, they will read statements about issues the candidates’ parties own. If they are in the “weak and unowned” treatment, they will be exposed to statements concerning issues owned by the party of which each candidate is not a member.

• **Democratic Issue Statements**

- “Affirmative action is an important issue in this campaign. The government must ensure that affirmative action policies are enforced so that we may continue to redress the problems caused by slavery and racism during America’s past.”
- “It may not be a popular position to hold, but I support an increase in federal affirmative action programs. As much as we would probably like to pretend that it is not so, many minorities are still held back by a long tradition of racial discrimination.”
- “Health care is high on my agenda. I can assure you that I will introduce and support legislation seeking to ensure that all Americans are provided adequate medical care regardless of their financial situations.”
- “Americans face many obstacles today, one of which is access to health care. Many people feel as if we prioritize the welfare of insurance providers over the needs of citizens and I tend to agree. We need to rethink the way we approach health care in this country.”

• **Republican Issue Statements**

- “We have serious problems with our system of taxation in this country. Our system is complicated and our tax rates are far too high. I will make reducing the burden of taxes on American and simplifying our tax code my priorities.”
- “Our nation’s economy is clearly slowing down and we must act quickly to ensure that this economic lull will not last. Cutting taxes is a surefire way to stimulate the economy. Lower taxes means more money in your wallets, which means you’ll be able to spend more.”
- “Nothing is more important to me than national security. Because the safety of American citizens is always at the forefront of my mind, I will continue to support a strong and well funded military capable of defending us from foreign threats.”

- “There are a lot of people out there who do not care for America. We need to keep our military well funded so that we can take the fight to our enemies before they can bring it to us.”

Strong Stimuli

The difference between the strong and the weak treatments is that participants in the former groups will be exposed to the statements listed in the previous section along with those that follow.

• **Democratic Issue Statements**

- “I think that one of the things we really need to consider is how to make up for our country’s less than just past. Ending the government’s various affirmative action programs would be a serious mistake at this juncture.”
- “People sometimes ask me how I can continue to support affirmative action programs. The truth is that the roadblocks placed in front of African Americans centuries ago have yet to be fully removed.”
- “Access to adequate health care is something I think all Americans not only deserve, but have a fundamental right to. Rest assured that I have no intention of resting until every American citizen is able to receive health care coverage.”
- “It’s absolutely unconscionable that people go bankrupt because they can’t pay their medical bills in a country as wealthy as ours. People shouldn’t have to spend the last months of their lives arguing with their insurer about whether or not the treatments they need will be covered. There’s something fundamentally wrong with this situation.”

• **Republican Issue Statements**

- “American workers are overburdened with federal taxes. The results of tax reductions are clear to see: businesses create jobs, people return to work, mortgage rates decrease, and home ownership increases. Tax cuts work.”¹⁸
- “I will oppose any increase in individual or corporate taxes. I will also oppose any further reduction or elimination of income tax deductions and credits, unless offset dollar for dollar by reducing tax rates”
- “A well funded military is essential to maintaining a strong America. Nothing is more important than protecting this country and everyone in it.”

¹⁸ Heavily modified Cheney quote from the 2004 nomination convention.

- “We have the best military in the world and we need to keep it that way. Underfunding the military is not an option if we want to maintain America’s worldwide stature.”

Table 6: Participants’ Evaluations of the Senators in the First Experiment

Treatment	Evaluation Democratic Senator Franklin						
	Ideology	Health care	Aid to blacks	Taxes	Defense	Government services	Abortion
Control	3.39 (1.07)	4.47 (2.27)	4.12 (2.21)	4.27 (2.35)	4.74 (2.26)	4.24 (2.45)	3.64 (2.23)
Ambiguous owned	2.21 (0.86)	3.84 (2.44)	3.53 (2.58)	4.01 (2.19)	4.39 (1.85)	3.39 (2.26)	2.86 (1.62)
Ambiguous unowned	4.01 (1.12)	5.97 (2.29)	5.58 (2.04)	5.63 (2.48)	6.05 (2.45)	5.03 (2.26)	5.15 (2.54)
Precise: owned and expected	2.19 (0.93)	3.58 (2.39)	3.26 (2.89)	4.00 (2.59)	4.30 (1.98)	3.23 (2.07)	3.27 (2.17)
Precise: unowned and expected	2.86 (1.00)	4.77 (2.77)	4.30 (2.55)	3.64 (2.63)	4.75 (2.75)	4.15 (2.60)	3.57 (2.29)
Precise: owned and unexpected	4.19 (1.56)	6.71 (3.11)	7.28 (3.11)	5.85 (2.52)	5.51 (2.20)	5.72 (2.81)	4.98 (2.69)
Precise: unowned and unexpected	4.48 (1.38)	5.72 (2.55)	5.48 (2.35)	5.94 (2.78)	6.55 (2.96)	5.55 (2.46)	5.00 (2.29)
	Evaluation of Republican Senator Perkins						
	Ideology	Health care	Aid to blacks	Taxes	Defense	Government services	Abortion
Control	4.99 (1.17)	7.47 (2.39)	6.84 (2.57)	7.48 (2.48)	7.20 (2.28)	7.24 (2.42)	8.38 (2.11)
Ambiguous owned	5.58 (0.84)	7.86 (2.15)	7.35 (2.35)	7.83 (2.43)	8.39 (2.44)	7.70 (2.08)	8.31 (1.93)
Ambiguous unowned	3.78 (1.10)	6.60 (2.16)	5.96 (2.29)	6.60 (2.05)	6.18 (1.83)	6.36 (1.81)	6.74 (2.20)
Precise: owned and expected	5.51 (0.99)	7.88 (2.48)	7.65 (2.25)	8.07 (2.66)	8.97 (2.16)	7.86 (2.09)	8.44 (2.02)
Precise: unowned and expected	5.64 (1.19)	8.28 (3.11)	8.30 (2.73)	7.73 (2.36)	7.38 (1.86)	7.74 (2.19)	8.19 (2.09)
Precise: owned and unexpected	3.76 (1.40)	5.99 (2.60)	5.97 (2.10)	4.92 (3.12)	5.85 (3.13)	5.94 (3.32)	6.63 (2.43)
Precise: unowned and unexpected	3.27 (1.35)	5.51 (2.90)	4.50 (2.92)	5.98 (2.34)	5.78 (2.17)	5.67 (2.52)	6.19 (2.51)

Note: Table entries are means. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses.

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